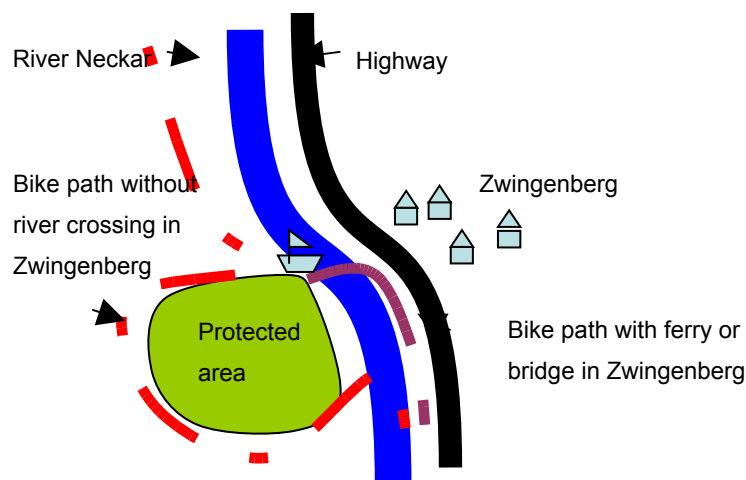


River crossing in Zwingenberg

Zwingenberg is a small German village of about 800 inhabitants located along the enchanting valleys of the Neckar River. Its luring attractions include “a castle from the 12th century, the ruggedly picturesque wolf canyon, small creeks, fields, and forests with a special charm.” Tourism is an important source of income to the local economy. This is especially true of cycling tourism since a bike path that follows the Neckar River called the “*Neckartal-Radweg*” goes through the village. Cyclists and other travelers along this path must cross the river at Zwingenberg because of an environmental protection area that prohibits its continuation along the west bank of the river.

To connect the watersides, a ferry has crossed the Neckar for many years, transporting about 10 cars and 120 cyclists per day. In 2007 the ferry needed to be retired, forcing the mayor of Zwingenberg, Roland Habich to make a tough decision. Choices included ordering a new ferry, building a bridge across the Neckar River, or giving up the crossing point at Zwingenberg.



The first option, purchasing and running a new ferry, would be the most expensive for Zwingenberg. Maintenance costs for the ferry and labor costs for the ferryman would burden the village’s budget with at least € 32,000 per year, excluding the cost of the new ferry at about € 1.5 million. It could be run for the next 40 years. Some members of the city council argued that the ferry served as a tourist attraction for the cyclists, who enjoy the scenic landscape while crossing the river.

The second option, building a bridge would by around € 6 million and neglect able maintenance costs, the most expensive option. However, Zwingenberg would only have to pay € 104,000 for the construction of the bridge, because programs from the state of Baden-Württemberg, the federal government of Germany, and the European Union would pay the remaining € 5.8 million in

construction costs. The bridge would ensure the save transportation of residents and tourists across the Neckar River at Zwingenberg. Cyclists would not have to cross the busy highway to reach the ferry anymore, shipping traffic on the river Neckar would be reduced. The bridge would also shorten the time needed to cross the river, and be available 24 hours a day. As opposed to the limited working hours of the ferry because of a lack of qualified personnel. Opponents criticized that the construction of the bridge would change the natural landscape of Zwingenberg. They argued that it would detract from the river in its undisturbed beauty and the historical castle. Others argued that the bridge could “also be enrichment for the scenery.” An environmental NGO criticized the intervention in the natural landscape that would be caused by the bridge and the fact that one of its endpoint would be in the environmental preservation area. The organization feared that increased motorized traffic would disturb the protected birds living in that area. Additionally they contended that the untouched landscape should be maintained. As Andre Baumann, vice chairman of the NGO stated, “Especially because plenty of bridges and sluices already exist in the Neckar Valley, the free view over the scenery should not be inhibited.” After an article was published in a regional newspaper, the organization of taxpayers got involved in the case. They pointed to the overall lack of cost-efficiency of the bridge, because only few people cross the river on an average day and the next bridge is located nearby. Even if the construction of a bridge would be nice for Zwingenberg, their spokesperson argued, “the total costs of the bridge have to be considered from the taxpayers’ point of view, independent from the question, ‘which part of the state will pay for it?’”

Giving up the river crossing at Zwingenberg was the third option. Pedestrians and cyclists on the Neckar bike-path would have to travel an additional 15 kilometers with an altitude difference of more than 200 meters to reach the next river crossing. The option would have less severe implications for those traveling by car since the extra kilometers would not take much more time than crossing the river by ferry. Although in case of accidents, where minutes might be decisive, ambulances would be faster with a bridge. This option was the cheapest one for Zwingenberg, but it could ultimately cost Zwingenberg its reputation as a cycling tourist destination. The owner of the restaurant and the small bed and breakfast in Zwingenberg were vehemently arguing against this option.

After weighing the pros and cons, mayor Habich opted for the second option. In July 2007, he announced in a press conference, “We decided in consensus to replace the insecure, old and decrepit ferry with a bridge.” For the most part, the inhabitants of Zwingenberg accepted the decision; however, protest arose immediately from two different groups: an environmental NGO and the organization of taxpayers. By keeping the issue alive in the press and by putting pressure on state level deputies, they succeeded in pushing for an investigation by the Committee on Petitions of the parliament of the state of Baden-Württemberg, which had to supply funds for the building of the bridge. In October 2007, the members decided to go to Zwingenberg for an on-site visit.